

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Volume 17 Edition 46

©SS 2025

U.S. EDITION

stripes.com

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2025

Changing of the guard

Virginia class becomes
backbone of US sub fleet

Page 2



The Virginia-class attack submarine Mississippi conducts alpha trials in the Atlantic Ocean.

GENERAL DYNAMICS ELECTRIC BOAT/U.S. Navy

COVER STORY

Virginia class new ‘backbone’ of sub fleet

Boats are bigger, stronger, faster, quieter than older Los Angeles class

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

BREMERTON, Wash. — The Navy officially has a new “backbone” of its submarine fleet that is bigger, faster, quieter, and has more endurance and firepower than the Vietnam War-era design it passed by in sheer numbers this past summer.

Admirals, U.S. senators and other VIPs gathered April 5 at Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, Conn. Sailors in dress blue uniform were given the traditional command: “Man our ship and bring her to life.” They ran up the gangplank to formally commission the new Virginia-class attack submarine USS Iowa.

On July 25, a smaller gathering at Naval Base Kitsap, in Washington state, marked the decommissioning of the USS Helena, a Los Angeles-class attack submarine.

“For nearly 40 years she has operated in the silent, unseen depths — a critical spearhead in our nation’s defense,” said Cmdr. Kyle Jones, commander of the boat.

The ceremonies represented a tipping point for the Navy.

The Iowa is the 24th Virginia-class sub to enter Navy service. The Helena’s exit leaves the Navy with 23 Los Angeles-class submarines that entered service from 1976 to 1996. The Navy also has three 1990s-era Seawolf-class attack submarines.

Navy promotional materials in recent decades have touted nuclear-powered attack submarines as “the backbone” of the undersea fleet.

Bryan Clark, a former Navy submariner who’s now a senior fellow at Hudson Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank, said having the number of Virginia boats surpass Los Angeles boats is good news for modernizing U.S. national defense.

“The Virginia class is the jack-of-all-trades for the Navy,” Clark said. “It’s



The USS North Dakota, a Virginia-class attack submarine, rolls out of the indoor factory at General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Conn.

simply more sophisticated than the Los Angeles class.”

Until this year, the most numerous attack submarine in the U.S. Navy was a design that started construction in 1972 — the year the keel was laid for USS Los Angeles.

The 7,800-ton Virginia class is designed to remain submerged for up to three months, moving through the water at 25 knots with four torpedo tubes and 12 vertical-launching Tomahawk cruise missile tubes.

Clark said the Virginia class not only outperforms the Los Angeles class but should also best the Russian Akula class and Chinese Shang-class in the competition for dominance of nuclear hunter-killer submarines. He added that it has better “acoustic silencing” of noise as it prowls the seas and a more sophisticated sonar array.

“It’s the quietest submarine we’ve ever had,” Clark said

The majority of Virginia-class submarines were initially assigned to homeports where they could shadow Russia’s more advanced submarines, particularly in the Arctic regions. But the recent assignment of the USS Minnesota to Guam and the arrival in Hawaii of more Virginia-class subs, such as the USS Montana, shows the Navy is starting to spread out its most modern submarine. The Virginia-class is now operating in the south and central Indo-Pacific region, where China is the



JUSTIN YARBOROUGH/U.S. Navy

Sailors operate the helm console in the control room aboard the Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS New Jersey as the submarine transits the Atlantic Ocean, on Oct. 30, 2024.

major “peer adversary.”

So far, the strategic Achilles’ heel of the Virginia class has been its slow pace of construction.

The Navy currently has 50 attack submarines at a point when the Pentagon had hoped to have 66 arrayed around the world.

Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel and senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington, D.C., said that the reason the Virginia class is the most numerous Navy attack submarine today is largely due to the speed with which the Los Angeles-class subs have been retired. The Virginia program, meanwhile, has had

production delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and industrial reductions after the Cold War.

“We’re at the bottom of the bathtub, with the lowest production rate for submarines since the 1990s,” Cancian said.

When approved by Congress in 1999, the Navy’s plans for the Virginia-class subs called for building two to three each year with a price of about \$2.8 billion each, the service wrote. Production would end in 2043, with the last boats leaving service in the 2070s.

The two shipyards building submarines — General Dynamics Electric Boat, in Groton, and HII-Newport News Shipbuilding, in Virginia, have turned out an average of 1.2 boats per year.

A 2024 Navy analysis showed that the Virginia program suffered from \$17 billion in cost overruns and delays, and production was two to three years behind schedule.

Costs for each Virginia-class submarine continue to rise. The newer Block IV models, which include an extended weapons bay, cost \$4 billion each, according to the U.S. Naval Sea Systems Command.

While the transition from the Biden to the Trump administration has brought significant changes to many policies and programs, the Virginia-class submarine program has drawn both bipartisan support and criticism.

Democrats and Republicans have decried the slow production cycles for submarines — a problem plaguing almost every Navy ship construction program, from Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers to Constellation-class frigates.

Navy and political leaders have pointed to submarine construction as the nation’s No.1 naval priority.

Lloyd Austin, the defense secretary under President Joe Biden, called the Virginia-class “the apex predator” of the world’s oceans during congressional testimony last year.

In 2017, President Donald Trump gushed about the Virginia-class attack and new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines.

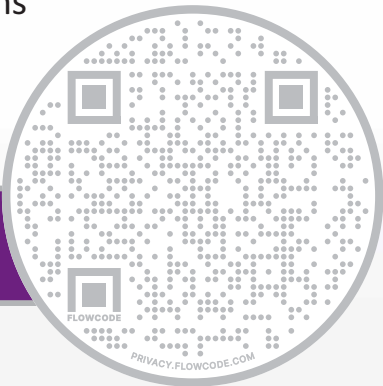
“The most powerful machines ever built, and nobody knows where they are,” Trump said.



Captions empower clarity and confidence

Hearing loss can make a simple phone call an obstacle for anyone, and it can be an especially isolating experience for veterans. That’s why Hamilton® CapTel® created the Heroes With Hearing Loss® program, providing educational resources and no-cost Captioned Telephone solutions to ensure our nation’s heroes are never left behind. With easy-to-read captions on every call, staying connected with family, friends, and fellow servicemembers is no longer an obstacle.

Discover HeroesWithHearingLoss.org



Only available stateside. Does not require a VA disability rating.

Provided by Hamilton® CapTel®. FEDERAL LAW PROHIBITS ANYONE BUT REGISTERED USERS WITH HEARING LOSS FROM USING INTERNET PROTOCOL (IP) CAPTIONED TELEPHONES WITH THE CAPTIONS TURNED ON. Automatic speech recognition software generates captions of what the other party to the call says, and, in certain circumstances, a live communications assistant may be included on the call to make needed corrections and/or add call details. The captions are then sent to the phone. There is a cost for each minute of captions generated, paid from a federally administered fund. To learn more, visit fcc.gov. Third-party charges may apply: the Hamilton CapTel phone requires high-speed internet access (Wi-Fi capable) and in some cases, may require telephone service. Third-party trademarks mentioned are the property of their respective owners. CapTel is a registered trademark of Ultratec, Inc. Copyright © 2025 Hamilton Relay. Hamilton is a registered trademark of Nedelco, Inc. d/b/a/ Hamilton Telecommunications.

092325

MILITARY

Army brings AI into promotion process

Technology can quickly evaluate which NCOs have qualifications to be considered

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Army Human Resources Command has introduced artificial intelligence into noncommissioned officer boards to help more quickly evaluate who has the qualifications to be considered for promotion.

The driving force behind the Army's Comprehensive Board Reform and Analysis program is to make boards more efficient, smarter and ultimately more transparent, Col. Tom Malejko, chief talent analytics officer at Army Human Resources Command, said this month during the Association of the U.S. Army's annual meeting in Washington.

"The first thing to understand is that we are not using it to replace humans," he said. "We're using it very broadly to

augment their decision-making."

The command created a "naive" AI system that does not look at names, branches or ranks, but instead can screen out people who haven't reached a certain command level or attended a specific school.

"Can we screen out individuals that are not really competitive for the process upfront ... helping our board members to focus their valuable time and resources on those individuals that are then most competitive for that selection?" Malejko said.

Maj. Gen. Hope Rampy, commander of Human Resources Command, said this could help in the sergeant first class evaluation boards, when every NCO of that rank is being evaluated.

Some are not competitive for the promotion yet but must get a merit list

score.

Before acting on AI decisions, Malejko said a team of people reviews every step the AI model considered to ensure there is no bias.

"Our approach is to work our way through our noncommissioned officer boards first, learn from them and then pilot from those," he said. "Based on what we've learned, go back to Congress and ask for additional authorities so we can actually execute them within our officer boards, since Congress ultimately controls those responsibilities."

The Army has, however, used an AI-like algorithm for the past four years to determine which officers should be invited to a selection board, Rampy said. Each year their post-evaluation has helped programmers

refine the algorithm to be more effective.

In the beginning, more than 30 officers were overlooked by the system and had to be manually included, Rampy said. Now that's down to about three to five.

"Because you can retrain it, it got better every year," she said.

The command is now looking to make a similar program to search the Army's personnel and pay system for specific skills for a specific mission or job. Because soldiers can add skills, such as languages or hobbies, to their talent profile, this could include skills outside the scope of their job in the Army.

Thayer.rose@stripes.com
@Rose_Lori

Army moves forward to place microreactors

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army will place commercial nuclear microreactors on some of its bases in the coming years under a private-public partnership it has dubbed the Janus Program, Army Secretary Dan Driscoll announced Oct. 14.

The program — named for the Roman god of transition — seeks to bolster the Army's ability to power its bases as the service anticipates expending drastically more energy in the coming years as it increasingly adopts artificial intelligence capabilities and new-age weaponry, officials said.

"We're going to need to be able to access power like we have never needed it before," Driscoll said at the annual Association of the U.S. Army convention in Washington. "If you think about our depots and our arsenals and our bases in this country and around the world, we have incredible space, [and] we have incredibly talented soldiers who want to partner with industry, who want to invite them onto

our land to help us solve this incredibly difficult problem ... on helping to grow the micro-nuclear reactor space that is something that will benefit the United States Army, but also the country as a whole."

Officials envision the first microreactors being in place by 2028. They will be owned and operated by the commercial companies that supply them but with Army oversight. The service has not selected which of its installations will receive the nuclear power sources, officials said.

Microreactors are nuclear reactors about 100 to 1,000 times smaller than conventional reactors. Some can be small enough to be transported on a tractor-trailer, according to the Idaho National Laboratory, which oversees much of the Department of Energy's nuclear power research. The reactors can produce up to 50 megawatts of power and can function independently of the traditional electric grid.

Pentagon officials have been considering building nuclear microreactors on military installations for several



Oklo Inc.

An Oklo Inc. rendering of the nuclear microreactor building that the Pentagon wants to construct at Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska.

years. Driscoll said the Army, with help from the Energy Department, will move forward with those plans.

The announcement also comes after President Donald Trump in May issued an executive order directing the Army to establish a program for "the utilization of nuclear energy for both installation energy and operational energy" on military posts by the end of 2028. Energy Secretary Chris Wright said the Idaho National Laboratory will begin testing "next generation, small

modular reactors" by next summer and plans to have "10 to 12 of them operating in the next couple of years."

Nuclear power, Wright said, provides a number of advantages over traditional power sources. Nuclear reactors work constantly and can last decades without refueling. They also continue running even if there are problems with the national power grid, like in the case of an enemy attack.

dickstein.corey@stripes.com

MILITARY

Army hastens work on tank replacement

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army is fast-tracking a new main battle tank, the M1E3, designed to be lighter, faster and more survivable — reflecting lessons from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

General Dynamics Land Systems received a \$150 million contract in July for initial development of the tank at its Sterling Heights, Mich., facility. An Army Science Board report this year projected the M1E3 would take seven years and \$2.9 billion to develop.

Four prototypes are expected by next year to be deployed with as yet undetermined Army units for testing.

The Army has set a 2030 target date for deployment, but General Dynamics officials said recently that an early prototype is expected by year's end, with full production potentially starting by 2027 or 2028.

The M1E3 replaces the canceled M1A2 SEPv4 as the Army's planned future main battle tank, succeeding the M1 Abrams, which has been the Army's main battle tank since it replaced the M60 Patton about half a century ago.

The new tank would counter Russia's T-90 and China's Type T-99 tanks.

Maj. Gen. Glenn Dean, head of Army ground combat systems, said the Ukraine war revealed critical flaws in



BRIAN SUTHERLAND/U.S. Army

An M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank displays the American flag during exercises in Bulgaria in September. The Army is speeding up the development of its new battle tank, the M1E3.

traditional tank design, emphasizing the need for better crew protection over simply adding more armor.

The Army said it had studied intelligence from the war in Ukraine, which showed main battle tanks are vulnerable to attacks from above by drones striking at crew turret hatches and engine compartments.

The M1A2 SEPv4's 73-ton frame couldn't be upgraded without heavier armor that would compromise mobility and logistics and shorten combat range because of the increase in fuel con-

sumption.

The M1E3 will feature a three-person crew and an automated turret and loading system, and it will retain the Abrams' 120 mm smooth-bore gun.

The Iron Fist active protection system developed by Israel will detect and intercept incoming threats, using jamming and counter-projectiles to deflect or cause the munitions to explode before striking the M1E3.

Powered by a hybrid diesel-electric engine, the M1E3 will have a greater range and speed than the Abrams,

which is powered by a gas-turbine engine.

The M1E3 will weigh about 60 tons — about 7 tons lighter than the M1A2 Abrams and 13 tons lighter than the proposed M1A2 SEPv4, allowing for better traction, mobility and a reduced electromagnetic signature on the battlefield.

A Remote Weapons Station, designed to engage drones, will allow crew members to fire .50-caliber secondary weapons without becoming exposed.

The Army has said it could also arm the new tanks with its own drones, such as the AeroVironment Switchblade, designed for tactical precision strikes and reconnaissance.

The new tank's systems would also be able to network communications and countermeasures with other tanks and troops to coordinate assaults and buttress defensive positioning. Modular systems will allow for quick repairs and upgrades in the field.

Development of the Abrams tank began in 1971 and deliveries to the Army began in 1980.

The original M1A1 variant led the armor pincer attacks into Iraqi-occupied Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The updated M1A2 entered service in the mid-1990s.

warner.gary@stripes.com

Firms show interest in \$151B Golden Dome contract

BY BRADLEY LATHAM
Stars and Stripes

WIESBADEN, Germany — President Donald Trump's vision for a missile defense system dubbed the Golden Dome may be coming closer to fruition, with the Pentagon taking offers for fulfilling a contract pegged at \$151 billion.

An updated solicitation for the Scalable Homeland Innovative Enterprise Layered Defense, or SHIELD, program gave interested companies until Oct. 16 to submit proposals.

The initial Defense Department contract announcement in September drew more than 1,500 inquiries during a five-day question period, according to official documents attached to the updated announcement.

SHIELD would include ground- and

space-based systems, satellites and weapons capable of detecting and destroying missiles fired at the U.S. homeland.

In a January executive order titled "The Iron Dome for America," Trump called on the DOD to develop a next-generation missile defense shield to protect the U.S. against ballistic, hypersonic and advanced cruise missiles.

The term Iron Dome is from an Israeli missile defense system that protects a vastly smaller territory than the one envisioned for the U.S.

The American version was later rechristened the Golden Dome. In May, Trump said the missile defense system would cost \$175 billion and be operational by the end of his term.

It's unclear how much of the Golden Dome the SHIELD program would



FRANK SPATT/U.S. Army

A Patriot Advanced Capability 2 Interceptor missile is fired from Koror, Palau, in August.

cover, but Trump's proposal has received pushback for various reasons.

"There are certainly technical challenges with the integration of all these capabilities into one," Gen. Gregory Guillot, head of U.S. Northern Com-

mand and North American Aerospace Defense Command, said during a congressional hearing in May. However, Guillot added that such a system is possible.

Other questions about the viability of Trump's vision revolve around the cost estimates.

A constellation of space-based interceptors designed to defeat intercontinental ballistic missiles could cost as low as \$161 billion, according to a Congressional Budget Office memo in May.

But an advanced system capable of defending an attack by peer or near-peer adversaries, such as Russia or China, could cost upward of \$542 billion over 20 years, the CBO said.

latham.bradley@stripes.com

MILITARY

Making hazardous duty seem routine

Each Sky Soldier took less than a minute to touch the ground after exiting a plane

By KENT HARRIS
Stars and Stripes

The second week of October was unseasonably warm around Aviano Air Base, Italy, with several warm days of almost cloudless skies.

That made it just a bit easier for hundreds of Sky Soldiers to practice their craft: Jumping from an aircraft hundreds of feet above the ground.

It took less than a minute for each soldier from the 173rd Airborne Brigade to touch the ground after exiting a pair of C-130Js from the 37th Airlift Squadron onto the Juliet Drop Zone in a series of training jumps launched from the base.

"A beautiful day for almost anything," said Pfc. Zachary Pierce while helping Spc. Ian Hart secure his parachute and associated gear before a jump.

That didn't mean that soldiers were taking their tasks lightly. Far from it.

Though some might envy the brief — but somewhat stunning — views while gliding down on parachutes onto a green field at the foot of the Dolomites, there was a lot going on behind the scenes.

Soldiers making the jumps traveled from their home base in Vicenza, more than an hour away, and spent a good portion of their day waiting for their cues at the Personnel Alert Holding Area on base.

There, many watched a short presentation on the field — located about 20 minutes east of Aviano near the village of Vajont — and practiced lining up and exiting from a metal structure that resembled an aircraft (with some imagination).

They eventually paired off and helped each other don one of hundreds of parachutes methodically packed by their colleagues based at Aviano. After a backup chute and other gear totaling roughly 100 pounds was added, they sat along rows of wooden benches specifically designed for the task.



PHOTOS BY KENT HARRIS/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, watch their comrades parachute onto the Juliet Drop Zone near Vajont, Italy, on Oct. 8.



Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade start to board a C-130J from the 37th Airlift Squadron, 86th Airlift Wing at Aviano Air Base, Italy.

Jumpmasters — soldiers who have passed an advanced training school and been on at least a dozen jumps themselves — then inspected each soldier's gear from head to toe, ensuring that everything was just right.

"It's a very thorough inspection," said 2nd Lt. Dustin Buwal while finishing up his review of Hart's gear.

Then it was a few more hours of waiting until the call was made to stand up and cross the South Ramp onto the waiting aircraft.

Two C-130s, part of the 86th Airlift Wing at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, had made the trip over the Alps on Tuesday and stayed for the four-day event. Only one of them was available

to make jumps the last three days due to a mechanical issue.

That left some soldiers unable to jump. Those troops were bused later to the drop zone to join their comrades and take part in training on the ground. Some watched as their fellow Sky Soldiers glided onto the landing zone.

All of those jumping had done so at least a few times before, having graduated from jump school. Some were making their first jumps onto the zone, though. A few others had achieved the designation of master jumper — with at least 64 jumps to their credit.

Given the brigade's deployment schedule, the availability of aircraft to jump from and sometimes unruly



Pfc. Zachary Pierce helps Spc. Ian Hunt adjust his parachute before a training jump.



Sky Soldiers take turns exiting a simulated plane before a jump.

weather in northern Italy, compiling that many jumps isn't easy.

Soldiers are required to make at least four jumps a year to be considered proficient.

"Ideally, you want to do more than the minimum," said Keith Platt, operations sergeant major for the 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment.

So the brigade looks to conduct such training at Aviano almost monthly. They also jump at other locations around Europe or in places such as north Africa during training.

A few dozen Italian paratroopers jumped along with them this time, while some of their comrades and Italian police helped secure the perimeter on the ground. Since this was only jump training, that mainly consisted of making sure that nearby traffic — and a few curious spectators — were safely far away from soldiers drifting from the sky.

MILITARY

Troops targeted online each day

Army: Adversaries seeking details on weapons, tactics

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. soldiers in 2025 are more likely to face the enemy online than on the battlefield, as American troops are targeted daily by foreign intelligence officers seeking details on weaponry and tactics, top Army officials warned.

Adversary intelligence officials target American soldiers on popular internet platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed and Reddit, hoping to find people who will share military secrets that could be beneficial in a future conflict, Army intelligence officials said this month at the Association of the U.S. Army conference in Washington.

The primary illicit actors represent America's top foes, such as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, who have increasingly been found working together to seek the latest American secrets, said Lt. Gen. Tony Hale, the Army's intelligence director.

"The adversary is collecting on us every day, no matter where we are," Hale said. "They're trying to connect virtually with service members, with family members, with Department of War and Department of Army [civilian] employees and with contractors to gain that advantage that they believe will help them win the next fight."

To counter the increasing enemy online activity, the Army has reorganized its counterintelligence community in recent years, standing up Army Counterintelligence Command in 2021 to oversee its 3,000 civilian and uniformed agents, the general said. Those agents have conducted more than 600 national security investigations — including more than 200 currently open cases — since 2021, leading to the arrests of 25 soldiers and former soldiers suspected of espionage.

And the workload is getting larger every year, Hale said.

That led Congress last year to grant the Army's civilian counterintelligence agents new authorities meant to bolster their ability to disrupt foreign intelli-



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

Army officials warned that adversary intelligence officers were likely present at this month's AUSA conference in Washington, where two massive trade room floors sported the latest weapons technology from top American and allied firms.

gence operations aimed at soldiers and Army civilians, Hale said. Those new authorities grant civilian agents the power to conduct searches, execute warrants and make arrests outside of Army posts, where most troops and service civilians live, the general said. He expects his civilian counterintelligence agents to begin using those new off-base authorities by the end of 2025.

Scott Grobatt, the Army counterintelligence special agent in charge for the northeastern region, said soldiers can become entangled with adversary intelligence officials both intentionally and unwittingly. Some are motivated by money provided in exchange for secrets, and others may be tricked into taking fake secondary jobs writing articles that could reveal useful information to foes, he said.

Leaders from the squad up through battalion-size units must be plugged in with their troops to identify when something seems amiss, including potential enemy spying activities, said Grobatt, who served as an infantryman before entering the Army intelligence community.

"There's one thing I know after 36 years in the Army, that is problems are identified and solved through the leadership chain," he said. "Squad leaders and team leaders, when you're in the barracks and you hear someone talking about, 'I just got a job to write a white

paper about that new piece of technology sitting in the motor pool.' ... Intervene, have a conversation, call the [local] counterintelligence agent so we can talk to them."

Army Counterintelligence Command has uncovered several recent cases of soldiers charged with willingly engaging in espionage.

For example, a Fort Bliss, Texas-based soldier, Spc. Taylor Lee, was charged in August with the attempted transmission of national defense information to a foreign adversary and attempted export of controlled technical data without a license.

Lee, 22, had sought to provide Russia with sensitive information about the M1A2 Abrams main battle tank, according to the Justice Department.

Hale and Grobatt warned that adversary intelligence officers were likely even present at the AUSA conference, where two massive trade room floors sported the latest weapons technology from top American and allied firms. Army Counterintelligence Command flooded the conference with "dozens of agents," Grobatt said.

"They are here to copy, steal, mimic, reverse-engineer our next generation lethality that will save our soldiers' lives and win our wars," the special agent said.

Army expands opportunities for lieutenants

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

The Army will expand a program that allows some lieutenants to apply for transfer into different career fields, including functional areas that were previously unavailable until after serving in command as a captain.

The expansion next month builds on a change made two years ago to the Volunteer Transfer Incentive Program which allowed lieutenants to transfer from over-strength fields, such as armor and infantry, into branches in need of more young officers, such as finance, air defense and signal, Maj. Gen. Hope Rampy, commander of Army Human Resources Command, said this month during the Association of the U.S. Army's annual conference in Washington.

Previously, a new officer would have to stay in a career field for seven or eight years before having an opportunity to switch to something new.

Functional areas are those that officers typically can't commission straight into and include space operations, acquisitions and simulation operations.

"What we understand, the generational difference is, 'I don't want to sign up to do ... the same thing for the rest of my life,'" Rampy said. "So we want to show that there's an opportunity to serve a career in the Army but not do the same thing for the rest of your life."

This will be the third year that the Army has expanded opportunities for lieutenants. In the first year, 137 lieutenants chose to switch jobs, Rampy said. More than 200 participated in the second year.

Each year had limitations on the types of jobs and the number of participants.

The idea stemmed from a very small dip in the number of officers staying through the rank of major, she said. Traditionally, about 45% of officers stay in the service that long, which allows the Army to fill nearly all of its major requirements.

thayer.rose@stripes.com
Rose_Lori

dickstein.corey@stripes.com

MILITARY

Army finds success with delayed entry

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army not only beat its recruiting goal last fiscal year by 1,000 enlistees, but it entered this year with double the number of recruits on its delayed entry roster than the year before.

With 22,000 recruits waiting to ship out, the Army now has predictability in sending soldiers to boot camp and the cushion to build on the changes it made to recruiting over the past four years to modernize how it fills its ranks, said Brig. Gen. Sara Dudley, commander of Army Recruiting Division at Fort Knox, Ky.

The Army's goal for fiscal 2026, which began Oct. 1, is to recruit 60,000 soldiers. Last year it aimed for 61,000 new soldiers and signed on 62,050.

Division staff members are revisiting where the Army assigns recruiters, how and where to point them to find prospective soldiers and restructuring the headquarters personnel to better serve the mission, Dudley said during an interview recently alongside Command Sgt. Maj. Danny Basham, the senior noncommissioned officer in the division.

"That has just not been able to happen because we've just been in a fire-fight trying to get people into the Army," Dudley said. "We have a lot of transformation that's still left to happen because we want to be good stew-

ards with the amount of NCOs that we're asking to bring to us from the Army."

The Army, like the Navy and Air Force, struggled to find enough people willing to fill its ranks coming out of the coronavirus pandemic.

The service missed its goal in 2022 and 2023 but has since rebounded, in part due to the measures it took to overhaul how it recruits.

The Army also launched the Future Soldier Prep Course to help people interested in enlisting but unable to qualify because they don't meet academic or fitness standards.

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll said Oct. 13 in his opening remarks to the Association of the U.S. Army's annual conference that 2025 was the Army's best recruiting year in 13 years.

"The future of the Army is lining up. Americans are courageously stepping forward to serve, and our Army should reflect the greatness of that choice," he said.

Now, the Army is scheduling recruits through March to attend boot camp, which has allowed it to modify the number of people it sends to the prep course, Dudley said. In the past, prospects could attend for both fitness and education. Now they can only need improvement in one area, Dudley said.

thayer.rose@stripes.com
@Rose_Lori



Department of Defense

Construction has begun on a defense contract to replace 15 miles of fencing along a training range in Arizona at the Mexico border with a new, taller barrier and an access road for federal border agents to patrol the area.

Work begins on \$230M border project in Ariz.

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Construction began Oct. 15 on a \$230 million defense contract to replace 15 miles of fencing along a training range in Arizona near the Mexico border with a new, taller barrier and an access road for federal border agents to patrol the area.

The Pentagon funded the project by pulling military construction dollars from Army, Navy and Air Force projects across the globe.

The project protects the Barry M. Goldwater Range in San Luis, Ariz., which is used by the military services as an aviation training location, including support for operations of the F-35, F-16, A-10 and F/A-18, Jordan Gillis, assistant secretary of the Army for installations, energy and environment, said during a call with reporters.

"This is a project that represents both a national security investment and a safeguard to military readiness," Gillis said. "When incursions occur and illegal border crossers get into that area, the ranges must close. That delays the training exercises, it diverts our time and our resources and ultimately impacts readiness."

The Marine Corps assumed jurisdiction this year of some of the roughly 1.7 million-acre range from the

Bureau of Land Management as part of the Trump administration's effort to transfer land along the southwest border into military-owned property. This allowed service members to begin patrols in the area for people who have crossed into the U.S. without authorization and circumvent a federal law that prohibits the military from conducting law enforcement activities outside of military property.

Army officials did not have an estimate of how frequently the range has been forced to close because people had entered it.

"I can tell you that because they do happen, whenever we are about to embark on range operations there, we have to spend a lot of time and effort and manpower doing a sweep to be sure that the range is clear," Gillis said. "Whether it's one or two or a dozen a year, we've got this safety mechanism in place that hopefully we can scale back on ... once the barrier is complete."

Bozeman, Mont.-based company BFBC LLC was awarded the contract to build the barrier Aug. 15 and should finish the work by August 2026. It has received defense contracts in the past for barrier work along the border.

thayer.rose@stripes.com
@Rose_Lori

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
Brian Bowers, U.S. Edition Editor
Scott Foley, Revenue Director

CONTACT US

633 3rd Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20001

Editorial: (202) 886-0005

Advertising: (202) 886-0014

Additional contact information: stripes.com

This publication is a compilation of stories from Stars and Stripes, the editorially independent newspaper authorized by the Department of Defense for members of the military community.

The contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and

are not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, including the Defense Department or the military services. The Guam Edition of Stars and Stripes is published jointly by Stars and Stripes and this newspaper.

The appearance of advertising in this publication, including inserts or supplements, does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised.

Products or services advertised in this publication shall be made available for purchase, use, or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation, or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user, or patron.

© Stars and Stripes, 2025

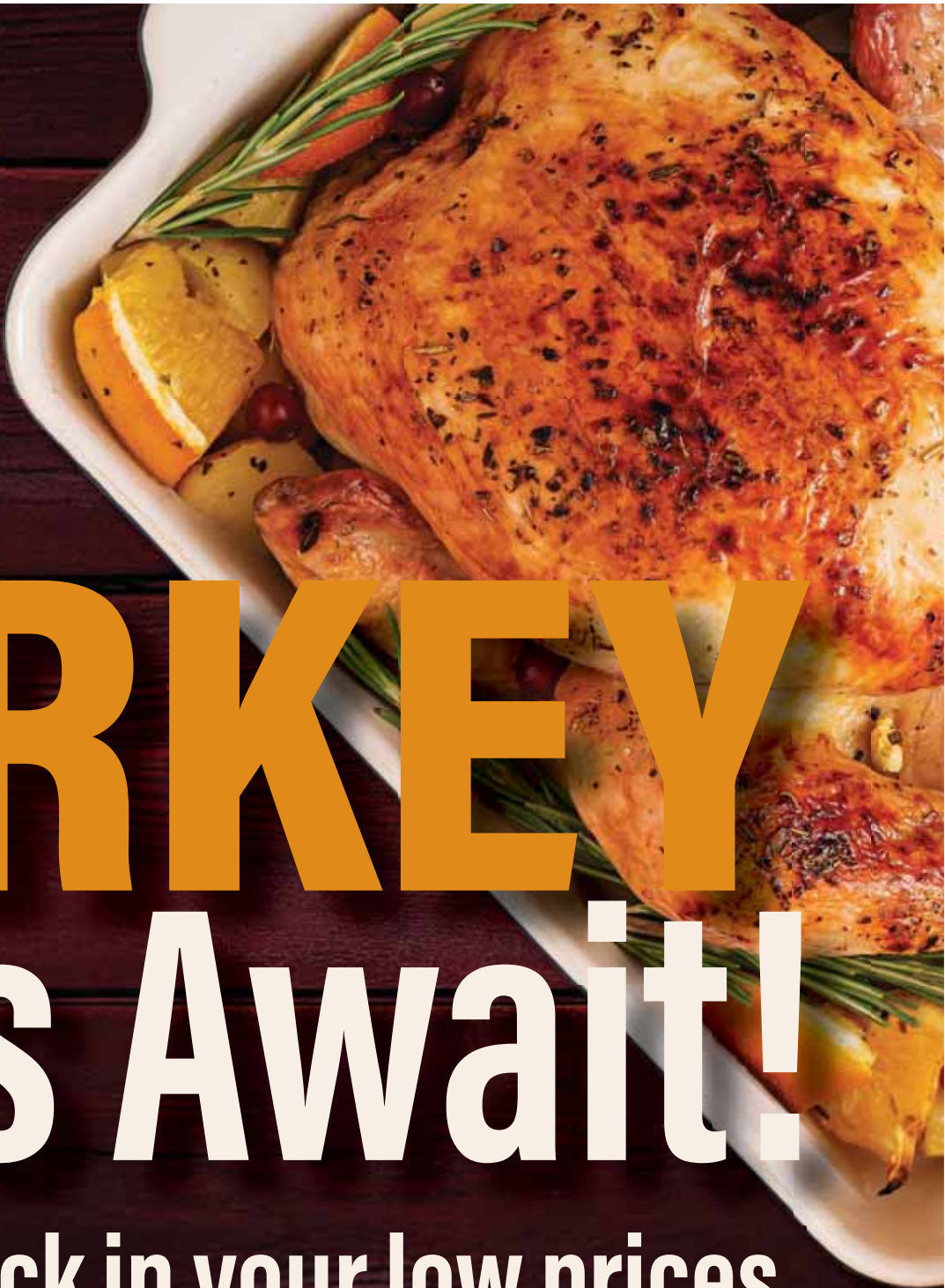
Rent your furniture. Own your future.

Furnish 3 rooms just \$129/month



CORT[®]

Like your favorite ride share or streaming service, CORT lets you access the furniture you need without owning anything you don't. Allow CORT Furniture Rental to design your space, deliver, set up, and then pick up your furniture at the end of your lease—all starting at \$129/month. We're experts at making military moves easier and helping you travel lighter. Get all the details at cort.com/stripes



TURKEY Deals Await!

Lock in your low prices.

Sale price applied at register. Limited time only. While supplies last.



commissaries.com

